

NSC BRIEFING

8 April 1954

MILITARY PICTURE IN INDOCHINA

- I. Many French leaders keep emphasizing military situation throughout Indochina steadily deteriorating.
  - A. They say at Dien Bien Phu, many of best reserves in Indochina being chewed up in enemy attacks.
    1. At Paris request we now going to airlift two paratroop battalions from North Africa, partially to redress this problem.
    2. Also they want a large US aircraft carrier as operating base for a French air unit.
  - B. French point to heavy infiltration of Tonkin delta as threatening already tenuous French hold there.
    1. About 20,000 regulars and 55,000 auxiliaries make daily routine of ambushing French Union troops, cutting rail and highway links between Hanoi and Haiphong.
    2. These troops, nevertheless, haven't yet exercised full capabilities, and heavier action may be expected.
    3. Nine regular battalions reportedly spread along Hanoi-Haiphong communications and expected to try soon to isolate Hanoi.
    4. French mobile reserves in delta, which numbered about 45 battalions in November, depleted by dispersal to Dien Bien Phu and Laos to 17.

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C. Build-up of Vietnamese army progressing very slowly  
25X1X7 [REDACTED] and no early prospect of its  
assuming much responsibility for security of country.

1. Total strength now 126 battalions; emphasis now on forming light battalions, 54 of which were activated last year and 66 more planned by end of 1955.
2. Most serious deficiencies are lack of qualified officers and poor spirit.

D. In addition, is easy to see that Viet Minh initiative in other areas keep French jumping.

1. In central Laos, force which invaded last Christmas still largely intact, evading French clearing operations, threatening lines of communication.
2. In central Vietnam, enemy troops are attacking small French outposts and harassing French coastal clearing operation "Atlante."
3. In south Vietnam, the Viet Minh continue to hit lightly manned posts and to subvert increasing numbers of Indochinese troops in outposts dotting the delta.
4. Incursion of Cambodia last week, although small, may be attempt to cut Mekong River line of communication, force further French Union dispersal and make political capital prior to Geneva.

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E. Navarre's plan to break back of Viet Minh resistance by mid-1955 on surface has suffered at least temporary setback.

1. Dispersal of North Vietnam reserves precludes offensives there.
2. In central Vietnam, clearing operation "Atlante" is keeping many troops tied down in rather unproductive effort. It not killing many enemy troops.
3. Navarre's plan to pacify the southern and northern deltas this year obviously is not meeting with success as Viet Minh hits and melts away before his forces.

III. The Viet Minh situation, however, is not all favorable.

- A. The enemy also has a manpower problem, probably more serious than the French.
  1. It can ill afford heavy casualties in its regular divisions.
  2. Reportedly the poorer quality of enemy replacements at Dien Bien Phu is already evident in weakening attacks.
- B. Viet Minh materiel, largely supplied by China, is inferior in quantity and quality to that of US-supplied French Union forces.

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- C. Although Viet Minh has initiative and manages to keep French off balance, apparently not capable of taking the Tonkin delta.
  - 1. Campaigns in other areas, although satisfying attritional aims, usually involves tactical targets.
- IV. Dien Bien Phu, therefore, may be crucial to war.
  - A. French losses won't be military catastrophe in terms men and materiel but will have serious impact on morale of French and Vietnamese troops and their leadership.
    - 1. Viet Minh influence, prestige among populace will be greatly enhanced. Losses of men would be much easier to recoup.
  - B. If French win, they can capitalize on heavy losses of Viet Minh and mount offensives planned by Navarre last summer.
    - 1. He originally planned to keep fighting in the Tonkin delta during the coming summer rainy season.
- V. At last reports, Dien Bien Phu defenders still repulsing Viet Minh attacks, Both sides seem very groggy.
  - A. Enemy directing main efforts against strongpoints Huguette, Dominique and Eliane.
  - B. However, De Castries HQ says combat fatigue and raw replacements have weakened enemy attacks.
  - C. But the Viet Minh reportedly has up to 20,000 replacements en route to Dien Bien Phu. These include:

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1. Recent recruits totaling 13,000 from north and southwest of the delta.
2. Units northwest of Dien Bien Phu now operating against pro-French guerrillas.
3. Troops in northern Laos.
4. Two battalions of Division 304 which had been on delta periphery.

D. French resupply and reinforcement seriously hampered by enemy antiaircraft fire.

1. French now dropping from high altitudes, using delayed action parachutes to prevent supplies from falling into enemy hands.
2. Small groups of paratroopers dropped by night have so far totalled about 500; an undetermined number, however, have landed in enemy territory.

E. [REDACTED] there is  
25X1C every indication that Viet Minh continues to concentrate on all-out effort to capture Dien Bien Phu regardless of cost.

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